

Black Sails

When I was young, I didn't think that kids were allowed to die. Dying was for old people, like grandparents or people who got really sick—grownups. Maybe that's why I always assumed that when my friend Pablo got sick, he would get better. But I was wrong.

I met Pablo at the Silverlake Rec Center Park. I can't remember what age I was, but my mom says I knew him since I was a baby. I do remember what we used to play: Pirates. We would tackle each other and climb to the top of the play structure and pretend it was a pirate ship. Sometimes we'd yelled down at the other kids to stay off our "ship" and threaten to make them "walk the plank." There were a couple of other kids we hung out with too, but the one I looked forward to seeing everyday was Pablo.

When it came time to start preschool, I didn't see Pablo very much anymore. I would still see him at the park on weekends sometimes. I met new friends in preschool who I liked to play with and we started going to a different park across town. Then, one Saturday, when I was about five years old, I saw Pablo but he looked so different I almost didn't know him. He used to have curly hair, but now his hair was gone and he was wearing a baseball hat to cover his head. He was very thin and looked like he was tired. He was hanging out with his older brother at the park and he didn't want to play pirates anyhow. I heard from my parents that Pablo had cancer and that he had needed a lot of treatments at the hospital. He had surgery and then the medicine made his hair fall out. I didn't see him at the park because he was in the hospital a lot and couldn't be around other kids.

One night before I went to bed, my mom told me something. She said that Pablo went back to the hospital. He had been coughing up blood and couldn't stop. His parents were going to bring him home from the hospital soon, but he was going to die. I went to bed thinking about Pablo and hoping he would get better, somehow. Sometimes I got sick, really sick, but I always got better. My mom and dad got sick too. What if something like this happened to them, or one of my other friends?

A few days later, my mom told me that Pablo had died at home. She asked me if I wanted to make something for him. I painted a picture of SpongeBob Squarepants and we took it to the memorial across the street from his house. I left it there, along with all the other things that people had made for Pablo.

Pablo's parents started an organization called "PabLove" that raises money for cancer research. Every year, they have a big fundraiser party. The first year, I went to it and it was actually really fun. I was nervous to see Pablo's parents and his brother, but they were busy running the party and talking to everyone. The money they are raising goes to help other kids who have cancer during their time in the hospital. Some of the money goes to research a cure for the type of cancer that Pablo had. I really hope they find a cure soon so that no one else has to go through what Pablo did.

I've only visited Pablo's grave one time. The place where they dug up the dirt was so small, it looked like a little kid was sleeping there. That reminded me that when Pablo died, we were only six years old. When we drive by the place where Pablo is buried, I always think about him and remember him the way he was. He had curly hair and this big laugh and he loved pirates. I think about the thing that I left at on his gravestone, something that I knew Pablo would like: A small gold pirate doubloon.